Les Murray: Watching with His Mouth

Peter Steele

Murray's books are dedicated 'To the greater glory of God', which provides a bond with Hopkins who, as a Jesuit, sailed under the same flag. There are other bonds. Here, for instance, are two passages from Hopkins's 'Notebooks and Papers'. Both are entries for 1871: they are separated by some months.

What you look hard at seems to look hard at you, hence the true and the false in stress of nature. One day early in March when long streamers were rising from over Kemble End one large flake loop-shaped, not a streamer but belonging to the string, moving too slowly to be seen, seemed to cap and fill the zenith with a white shire of cloud. I looked long up at it till the tall height and the beauty of the scaping — regularly curled knots springing if I remember from fine stems, like foliation in wood or stone — had strongly grown on me. It changed beautiful changes, growing more into ribs and one stretch of running into branching like coral. Unless you refresh the mind from time to time you cannot always remember or believe how deep the inscape in things is.... (330)

Nov. 8 — Walking with Wm. Splaine we saw a vast multitude of starlings making an unspeakable jangle. They would settle in a row of trees; then, one tree after another, rising at a signal they looked like a cloud of specks of black snuff or powder struck up from a brush or broom or shaken from a wig; then they would sweep round in whirlwinds — you could see the nearer and farther bow of the rings by the size and blackness; many would be in one phase at once, all narrow black flakes hurling round, then in another; then they would fall upon a field and so on. Splaine wanted a gun: then 'there it would rain meat' he said. I thought they must be full of enthusiasm and delight hearing their cries and stirring and cheering one another. (337)
Murray, in *Conscious and Verbal*, refers to some people as ‘watching with their mouths’ a sight to behold (82). Of Murray himself, as of Hopkins, it might be said that he is ‘watching with his mouth’. Reading the Hopkins prose with Murray in mind, my own eye is caught by several features.

There is, firstly, the prominence of the construing mind in the whole operation. ‘What you look hard at seems to look hard at you, hence the true and the false in stress of nature’, and ‘Unless you refresh the mind from time to time you cannot always remember or believe how deep the inscape in things is’ — these claims, at once zestful and chastened, might be answering to instinctive moves in Murray’s poetry, which stakes a lot on dynamic interplay between the watcher and the watched, but which is also alert to estimation’s mortal condition — the flux and fraying of concentration and of judgment. Murray’s poetry, as rich in lexical zest as in descriptive panache, is also frank about the second thoughts which, sooner or later, may shadow even forthright utterance.

Secondly, there is Hopkins’s appetite for the particular. This shows itself in the citing of person, place, time — elements to be found in many of Murray’s poems, less as dramatic arrangements than as imaginative imperatives — and in the drive towards cardinal or talismanic objects, felt or pressed for as iconic — potent, radiant, implicative. Murray too is one for the brimming of things: ‘Allow not nature more than nature needs,/ Man’s life is cheap as beast’s’: Murray’s ordinary assumption as a poet is that the ‘more’ of things calls for attestation, that the given is a well.

Thirdly, and vividly, there is Hopkins’s attunement to metamorphosis. Many poets are of Heraclitus’ party, taking to change as salamanders were once thought to take to fire: for them, the making of mutability cantos comes with the territory. But even for these, the gambit can be disconcerting, and a likely strategy is to manoeuvre between stability and fluidity, rock and river. Hence Hopkins’s ‘It changed beautiful changes, growing more into ribs and one stretch of running into branching like coral’; and hence Murray’s disposition to show both the flash of the weaver and the firmness of the web.

Poems do not want to be ‘characteristic’, they want to be themselves. But so do we, while usually becoming more characteristic as we go. Here then is the second of Murray’s ‘Three
Interiors', a title which, as often with him, is laden, looking as this one does not simply to what is roofed and walled in, but to a place's soul or genius and, more delicately, to the senses sleeping under the roof of language.

The softly vaulted ceiling of St Gallen's monastic library is beautifully iced in Rococo butter cream with scrolled pipework surf-dense around islands holding russet-clad, vaguely heavenly personages who've swum up from the serried volumes below. The books themselves, that vertical live leather brickwork, in the violin-curved, gleaming bays, have all turned their backs on the casual tourist and, clasped in meditation, they pray in coined Greek, canonical Latin, pointed Hebrew. It is an utterly quiet pre-industrial machine room on a submarine to Heaven, and the deck, the famous floor over which you pad in blanket slippers, has flowed in honey-lucent around the footings, settled suavely level and hardened: only the winding darker woods and underwater star-points of the parquetry belie that impression. What is below resembles what's above, but just enough, as cloud-shadow, runways and old lake shores half noticed in mellow wheat land. (Collected Poems 212)

Murray is a great reader of things 'as' other things — of their guising themselves evocatively, of their melting into or arising out of one another, of their being just-broken codes for each other. Implicitly, in much of his poetry, the world itself is a library, a library made not (as at some other hands) for stupefaction, but for copious divulging. So it is appropriate that when he considers St Gallen's library the reader is led into a microcosm, a place which is also a condition: and that the condition should be one of pluriform energies and performances.

Howard Nemerov, in 'Lion and Honeycomb', a poem which skilfully deprecates skill, imagines writing a poem 'perfected and casual as to a child's eye/ soap bubbles are, and skipping stones' (Nemerov 277). Murray's portrayal of a monastic interior is clearly more deliberated than that, but it too has some of a child's-eye-view of its subject — not least in that the first thing he has to tell us about it is that it is good enough to eat. This is a motif which, low-keyed but firm, returns at the end of the 'Interior', in the 'mellow wheat land'; and in fact the whole piece courts the senses, pointing as it
does to sight, sound and touch. The library, as Murray presents it, has something of the miraculous about it, amenable as it is to a child’s relishing, but laden too with significances warranting the best attention of an adult: it is, so to speak, Murray’s Wonderland. That it should be ‘an utterly quiet pre-industrial machine room/ on a submarine to Heaven’ has about it that combination of the gratuitous and the necessary of which Alice was the witness.

This portrayal has something else in common with Carroll’s — the comic spirit. Murray, who can write with great eloquence of the dreadful, is also a poet in whom comedy can spill over at unpredicted moments. ‘Vaguely heavenly personages’ come from that country, and so does the pun in ‘coined Greek’, where koine Greek, the lingua-franca of the ancient Mediterranean, keeps more solemn company, and so does the contrast between famous floor and blanket slippers, and so (more gravely) do the winding darker woods. This too, incidentally, answers to something in Hopkins, for whom nature’s plenty does not exclude incongruity, whether in his starlings as a cloud of snuff, or in Splaine’s ‘there it would rain meat.’ Murray, in whose poetry the insignia of command are often very evident, also writes as one for whom the comic attests those many things we cannot begin to command.

Something of that same spirit attends ‘Words of the Glassblowers’, whose motif might be, ‘that which takes your breath away, but incites speech at the same time.’

In a tacky glass-foundry yard, that is shadowy and bright
as an old painter’s sweater stiffening with light,

another lorry chockablock with bottles gets the raised thumb
and there hoists up a wave with flashbulbs feverish in a stadium

before all mass, nosedive and ditch, colour showering to grit,
starrily, mutually, becoming the crush called cullet

which is fired up again, by a thousand degrees, to a mucilage
and brings these reddened spearmen bantering on stage.

Each fishes up a blob, smoke-sallow with a tinge of beer
which begins, at a breath, to distil from weighty to clear

and, spinning, is inflated to a word: the paradis

to be marveled on iron, box-moulded, or whispered to while spun —
Watching with His Mouth

Sand, sauce-bottle, hourglass — we melt them into one thing:
that old Egyptian syrup, that tightens as we teach it to sing.
(New Selected Poems 123)

‘Glory’ is to the point here, in that Murray, glorifying the
commonplace, finds that, in effect, it glories in itself. Joseph
Brodsky used to claim that what he was doing was bringing to
expression poems which were already latent, or sleeping, in the
language. This is a large part of Murray’s pursuit also: but he writes
as though the language, and thus the poems, is latent in the things.
Watching the things, he is trying them with his mouth. ‘Words of
the Glassblowers’, then, is a poem which might stand for many
others — it is a kind of standard-bearer for Murray’s imagination.

It is also a poem which displays Murray’s highly-developed
dramatic sense. Having celebrated ‘the quality of sprawl’, he can
appear on occasion to lounge into, and out of, individual poems: but
that effect is usually misleading: the poems are in fact strongly
commanded, with entries and exits calculated and devised. So, here,
‘In a tacky glass-foundry yard, that is shadowy and bright/ as an old
painter’s sweater stiffening with light’ is in fact a bravura
beginning, with ‘tacky’ offering both the down-at-heel and a
surface where one walks cautiously; with ‘shadowy and bright’
its own foreshadowing the play of light and darkness to be found as
the poem develops; with the ‘old painter’s sweater’ carrying the
insignia of the painter’s quest; with ‘stiffening’ doing what (say)
‘body’ can do elsewhere, namely pointing now to mortality, now to
vitality. Tacky or not, this glass-foundry yard is offered by the
poem as pulsing with actuality, vivid with meaning.

Many a poet can set poems off at a cracking pace which they
cannot then sustain: but this is rare in Murray. ‘Words of the
Glassblowers’, having elected a striking process, keeps pace with
what is described: ‘before all mass, nosedive and ditch, colour
showering to grit,/ starrily, mutually, becoming the crush called
cullet’, for instance, has about it some of the ‘rise, the roll, the
carol, the creation’ which Hopkins often displayed, and whose lack
he lamented. Firing, fishing, spinning — the poem is a tissue of
displayed energies and skills, and these too are ‘counter, original,
spare, strange’ — matter for exultation.
The exultation, though real and untrammelled, is nonetheless gauged: that ‘thousand degrees’ points to intensity, but also implies measure: and the poem’s last line, ‘that old Egyptian syrup, that tightens as we teach it to sing’, jocose in one way, registers command in another. Murray, a lover of the offhand, and of the out-of-hand, also loves to keep things in hand. The glassblowers’ art to which he pays homage in this poem may itself be seen as modelling the poet’s art, having to do as it does with the melting-down and the transformation of language, a transformation which derives from, and mediates, insight.

The language headed for the poet’s foundry is of an extraordinary range. ‘Chockablock’, ‘ditch’, ‘starily’, ‘cullet’, ‘fishes up’, ‘smoke-sallow’, ‘weighty’, ‘paraison’, ‘marvered’, ‘old Egyptian syrup’ — no two of these are in quite the same linguistic key. When Murray names an hourglass along with sand and sauce-bottle, the hourglass works as an element, an item and an emblem, which divides it from the other two in an obvious way, but which also throws light on some of their histories and implications. Nemerov said that a poem is more like a mind than like a thought, and certainly Murray’s poems commonly have the ranginess of mentality, its span of wing to carry various and sizeable burdens. His great linguistic variety lends itself not only to flourish and display, but to complex, and concerted, attunement for meaning’s sake. A banterer he may be, himself: but also a scholar and teacher of singing.

In The Relevance of the Beautiful Hans-Georg Gadamer writes, variously, ‘The peculiar nature of our experience of art lies in the impact by which it overwhelms us ... We could say that the work of art signifies an increase of being’, and ‘The essence of the beautiful is to have a certain standing in the public eye’ (34-35, 50). Murray’s poetry is in effect keeping faith with both of these emphases. The poems attest emphatic response, partly awed, to things seen, heard and sensed: and they also make the things more prominent, more seemingly inexhaustible — give them ‘standing.’

A good case in point is ‘The Milk Lorry’.

Now the milk lorry is a polished submarine

that rolls up at midday, attaches a trunk and inhales
the dairy’s tank to a frosty snore in minutes
but its forerunner was the high-tyred barn of crisp mornings, reeking Diesel and mammary, hazy in its roped interior as a carpet under beaters, as it crashed along potholed lanes cooeeing at schoolgirls. Long planks like unshipped oars butted, levelling in there, because between each farm’s stranded wharf of milk cans, the work was feverish slotting of floors above floors, for load. It was sling out the hashed paint-collared empties and waltz in the full, stumbling on their rims under ribaldry, tilting their big gallons then the schoolboy’s calisthenic, hoisting steel men man-high till the glancing hold was a magazine of casque armour, a tinplate ‘tween-decks, a seminar engrossed in one swaying tradition, behind the speeding doorways that tempted a truant to brace and drop, short of town, and spend the day, with book or not, down under the bridge of a river that by dinnertime would be tongueing like cattledogs, or down a moth-dusty reach where the fish-feeding milk boat and cedar barge once floated.

(New Selected Poems 87)

Gadamer is speaking of works of art as wholes, but in poetry at least those wholes are attained phase by phase. ‘The Milk Lorry’ goes a protean path on which the older vehicle modulates from barn through beaten carpet through cooeeing, a craft, a ship’s hold, to a point of departure for other realms. The poem’s accelerating pace mediates intensity of being, an intensity which the lorry’s shape-shifting also dramatises. As is often the case in Murray’s poetry, an individual entity is offered as the occasion, and sometimes as the source, of displayed and discharged energies. The thing itself has its own glory, which can impinge on other things or on persons, and which can be attended by a variety of witnesses: and the poem’s course is a course of divulging some of what makes that thing itself radiant. The strategy can be one of overt analogy — as, for instance, with ‘till the glancing hold was a magazine of casque armour:/ a tinplate ‘tween-decks’ — or one in which the sense is partly submerged and gradually discovered, as in ‘a seminar engrossed// in one swaying tradition’, which has full force only when one remembers that a tradition is by definition a handing on or over,
something intellectually dramatic. Murray is a poet who, perhaps above all, wants to attest plenty, even if that plenty has to be located again and again in circumstances of constraint or lament. ‘The Milk Lorry’, which has some of the ring of Dylan Thomas about it, houses by implication the equivalent of Thomas's ‘shining men.’ A certain ‘overwhelming’ is part of the business in hand.

As is the beautiful as having standing in the public eye. Poetry as boast, as proclamation, is far from being the only creditable kind, but it certainly has ancient warrant. The Aeneid is patently of that character, as are the Psalms, as is Paradise Lost, as is most of Whitman. Such work does not edge upon the stage, but assumes its right (and in a sense its duty) to affront the reader with the vivid, the luminous, and sometimes the numinous. Murray’s copia of vivid terms — polished, frosty, reeking, mammary, tongeung, moth-dusty, fish-feeding, and so on — defy forgetting, and the defiance is itself part of the agenda. When terms are bonded paradoxically, as in ‘recking Diesel and mammary’ (or elsewhere as in ‘peasant mandarin’ or ‘weatherboard cathedral’), the gambit is like Pope’s or Donne’s fusion of otherwise unremarkable things in order to claim credibility for the new and there. It is an especially confident kind of ‘estrangement’, making poetry’s bid for saying how the world really is, as distinct from how, lazily, obediently, or bemusedly, it is usually said to be. It is in effect beauty standing to arms.

‘Watching with his mouth’: it is an expression which can also be understood as, ‘keeping watch with his mouth’, a form of vigilance. It is instructive to notice how this happens in some of Murray’s prose. Here are two passages from The Australian Year:

Snow lies on the Barrington Tops, at the western edge of my home country, hiding the matted fine-haired native grass but not penetrating the dense stands of evergreen Antarctic beech where the fern trees shelter. In summer, those stands of ancient nothofagus, the beeches of the southern world whose fossilised leaves are found beneath the ice in Antarctica, have a smell of cold and decay like European forests, but their leaves are leathery and hard. They speak of the lost continent of Gondwanaland, mother of India, Africa, Australia, Madagascar and South America, where some scientists believe plants may first have learned to flower, tens of millions of years ago ...  

(Reprinted in A Working Forest 180)
Human isolation in a remote valley or behind a forested range may accentuate the tendency of large and small holdings alike to become kingdoms with their own laws. The quietly spoken people who meet and yarn on the post office corner in a mountain town are often laconically ceremonious, because they are lords over space, with places to fall back on. They and those they talk with are powers and potentates, able to obstruct each other badly if offended. They possess dangerous mutual knowledge and deeply shared measures of worth. They hardly ever see their lives presented at all, let alone accurately, in books or newspapers, on TV or film, but they wouldn’t expect to, and the concealment can be welcome. The bush is instinctively close-mouthed, because so many have had to work both sides of the law to survive. Sometimes the closeness is cheerfully voluble, as persiflage conceals the dangerous information the outsider seems to be after. But many who live in pine-girt brick bungalows or the unpainted timber houses with their heat-wasting outside chimneys of flattened sheet iron are implacably remote. Like most bush people, they have wrestled with an angel. (Reprinted in A Working Forest 182)

Each of these passages is an example of Hopkins’s ‘looking hard’, of Murray’s own ‘watching with their mouths’ open. The first specialises in geographic eloquence — in something like Aldo Leopold’s ‘thinking like a mountain’ or Annie Dillard’s ‘teaching a stone to talk’ — and the second in historical eloquence, an art as old as Herodotus. The first rings the changes on attention to the domestic, the archaic and the primordial; and these are touched in not in any stratified fashion, but as shifting elements in a complex attentiveness. ‘Vigilant’ does seem the word here, not only for the sake of discrimination between contingent features — the grass as against the beech, Antarctica as against Gondwanaland — but to find out relationships between the given and the latent. There is, as it were, a subdued conversation between ‘my home country’, Gondwanaland the mother, and those early plants’ being lessoned into blossoming. The instinct for daring metaphor and simile, which serves Murray well in his poetry, also murmurs habitually through his prose.

The second passage endows milieux well known to Murray with something like epic grandeur. ‘Kingdoms with their own laws’, ‘lords over space’, ‘powers and potentates’ — it might be out of Homer. And why not, as Patrick Kavanagh would ask, who, in ‘Epic’, refers to the hugger-mugger of neighbouring farmers and,
when about to dismiss them, is reminded by Homer’s ghost, ‘I made the Iliad from such/ A local row. Gods make their own importance’ (Kavanagh 244). Murray is of course working in a different genre than the heroic: expressions like ‘laconically ceremonious’ and ‘implacably remote’ are in a modern acoustic. But he is, as usual, intent on amplifying regard. ‘Like most bush people, they have wrestled with an angel’, bidding as it does for biblical warrant, also solicits attention to the otherwise invisible. This too is vigilance, and it is above all vigilant before vulnerability.

To watch with mouth open finds other occasions in ‘Dead Trees in the Dam’:

Castle scaffolding tall in moat,
the dead trees in the dam
flower each morning with birds.

It can be just the three resident
cormorants with musket-hammer necks, plus
the clinician spoonbill, its long pout;

twilight’s herons who were almost too lightfoot
to land; pearl galahs in pink-fronted
confederacy, each starring in its frame,

or it may be a misty candelabrum
of egrets lambent before saint Sleep —
who gutter awake and balance stiffly off.

Odd mornings, it’s been all bloodflag
and rifle green: a stopped-motion shrapnel
of kingparrots. Smithereens when they freaked.

Rarely, it’s wed ducks, whose children
will float among the pillars. In daytime
magpies sidestep up wood to jag pinnacles

and the big blow-in cuckoo crying
Alarm, Alarm on the wing is not let light.
This hours after dynastic charts of high

profile ibis have rowed away to beat
the paddocks. Which, however green, are
always watercolour, and on brown paper.

(New Selected Poems 157)
A first response to this poem might be that it offers eight ways of looking at trees and birds, but a little reflection shows that the number is much greater, partly because of the variety of keyings of attention — ‘It can be ... it may be ... it’s’ and so forth — and partly because of Murray’s affection for the Heraclitean fire; as often in his poetry, here vividness itself seems to foster transmutation. So, for instance, in ‘It can be just the three resident/ cormorants with musket-hammer necks, plus/ the clinician spoonbill, its long pout’, ‘resident’ throws the ball to ‘clinician’, and ‘musket-hammer necks’ to ‘spoonbill’, and the spoonbill in effect becomes its own pout, as if we were once more in Alice country. Brodsky, writing of exile, remarks,

In a manner of speaking, we all work for a dictionary. Because literature is a dictionary, a compendium of meanings for this or that human lot, for this or that experience. It is a dictionary of the language in which life speaks to man. Its function is to save the next man, a new arrival, from falling into an old trap, or to help him realise, should he fall into that trap anyway, that he has been hit by a tautology. …

(Brodsky 33)

Murray writes as though finding the prospect of being ‘hit by a tautology’ particularly invidious: in his poetry, mouth and eye conspire to give freshness all the room it needs to move.

At the same time, few poets are more obviously committed than he to finding a perdurable past. The first stanza of this poem lays down a full hand in that interest, with its dead trees both being figured by the foreign, ancient castle, and themselves flowering on new terms. Murray is a constant attendant, a kind of servitor, of the many things which, being dead, will still not lie down. He is a lavisher of attention on the unpromising, the expendable, and the fugitive — an attention which, as this poem implies at a number of points, memorialises the mortal in pictorial fashion. Those ‘pearl galahs in pink-fronted/ confederacy, each starring in its frame’, those ‘dynastic charts of high// profile ibis’, brilliant touches in their own right, also reiterate the poem’s whole keying.

‘Dead Trees in the Dam’, as a title, implies termination: but as the poem actually goes, it is vivacity which quickly takes possession. The trees are nodded to in the pillars between which the ducklings float and on the wood where the magpies sidestep, but all
those birds provide in effect a billowing alternative foliage. This is only at one remove, if that, from the apprehension of world-as-tree, of austerity as stark path to opulence. Murray is no giddied Romantic, late or early: his ‘paddocks ... however green, are/always watercolour, and on brown paper’: but he is intransigent in the face of whatever tends to attenuate imagination — of the would-be-worldly insolence which hurries to dogmatise diminishment of the seen or the sayable.

He is also peculiarly confident in his own idiom, which is hospitable to many linguistic registers. Take, for instance, ‘or it may be a misty candelabrum/ of egrets lambent before saint Sleep——/ who gutter awake and balance stiffly off.// Odd mornings, it’s been all bloodflag/ and rifle green: a stopped-motion shrapnel/ of kingparrots. Smithereens when they freaked.’ Saints entertain prayers and are themselves unsleeping: they may however be seen as embodying desired or admirable conditions, and be applauded or invoked accordingly: whence the sleeping, burning egrets who as ‘lambent’ have a lightness of being before this most demotic of saints, and who, waking, take some of sleep’s ways into the country of consciousness. And then there is the conflation of contemplated violence with named elegance in the sequence of ‘bloodflag ... rifle green ... shrapnel ... smithereens’ — and ‘freaked’, the last word naturally carrying a shadow-companion, ‘— out’, but itself out of Milton, and pointing to the decorative, even the ceremonious. Murray’s is a verbal mode in which unseen doors are constantly being opened into surprising rooms.

It was said of an Irish politician, ‘give him enough rope, and he’ll hang you’: of Murray it might be said, ‘give him enough rope, and he’ll plait something new.’ He does not always need much rope, and not in ‘Amanda’s Painting’:

In the painting, I’m seated in a shield,
coming home in it up a shadowy river.
It is a small metal boat lined in eggshell
and my hands grip the gunwale rims. I’m
a composite bow, tensioning the whole boat,
steering it with my gaze. No oars, no engine,
no sails. I’m propelling the little craft with speech.
The faded rings around my loose bulk shirt
are of five lines each, a musical lineation
and the shirt is apple-red, soaking in salt birth-sheen
more liquid than the river. My cap is a teal mask
pushed back so far that I can pretend it is headgear.
In the middle of the river are cobweb cassowary trees
of the South Pacific, and on the far shore rise
dark hills of the temperate zone. To these, at this
moment in the painting’s growth, my course is slant
but my eye is on them. To relax, to speak European.

(Conscious and Verbal 1)

Those last five words in one way betoken enigma, and in another
summarise much of what has happened in the poem. For although
there is no current lingo which is ‘European-speak’, the poem is
veined through with echoes of sundry celebrated European dicta. To
be seated in a shield is a compromise between being with one’s
shield or on it: the river of shadows has ancient and formidable
provenance: the composite bow might be Odysseus’ gear: to propel
the little craft with speech is to reverberate with the first words of
the Purgatorio: to be clad as though for a musicking is Donne’s
business, and Herbert’s: to be steeped in soaked and salted apple-
red is to deploy the iconography of boldness, loss and gain. No
wonder, as first the painting and then the poem grows, Murray’s
course is slant and his eye on a far shore’s dark hills: whatever of
the originating painting, the poem reaches into lucidity and so to
mystery.

To steer with gaze and propel with speech is, after all, what
Murray has been doing from the beginning of his trenchant,
polymorphic task. As a teller of tales, he is lettered, revised and
stimulated by the evidence of things seen: as a delineator of figures,
he has also been preoccupied with the grounds against which they
are cut: as a fashioner of series and sequences, he is as interested in
prominent isolates as in life’s inevitable continua. All in all, his
poems are written as though singing school and seeing school are
lodged at the same address.

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BRUCE CLUNIES ROSS, inspired by Tony Wedgewood Benn's announcement that he was leaving parliament so that he can continue in politics, recently retired from his position in the Department of English at the University of Copenhagen in order to continue with scholarship though there are signs that he is entering his anecdotage.

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